

Ministers of Reconciliation



By Dallas Burdette April 18, 1998

Thrust Statement: Every Christian is a minister of reconciliation.

Scripture Reading: [2 Corinthians 5:19-20](#).^[1]

Are you a minister of God? How do you answer this question? Is the minister simply someone who stands in the pulpit on a weekly basis to expound the Word of God? Are Christians in general ministers of God? Do you pray that God will send forth laborers into His Harvest? Are you one of the laborers? Or do you expect God to send someone else? Do you feel a responsibility of making known the gospel of Christ and winning others to Him? Just how do you respond to these questions?

It is my desire to present a healthy challenge to you to reclaim the evangelistic vision of the early church and embark afresh on winning others to Him. To do this, one must recapture the urgency of proclamation, that is to say, the sharing of God's way of salvation in Jesus, the savior of the world. Are you a silent Christian? Is there shyness on your part about speaking to others about the love of God? If the gospel is the good news of God, Do we incur guilt if we do not pass it on? Are you a silent saint? Is this a silent church? Is this silence guilty silence? How can people believe in Jesus if they do not hear about Him? It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Christians in Rome.

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? **And how can they believe in the**

one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (**Romans 14:8-15**).

In this context, Paul poses the question of how can one believe in Him if he or she has not heard about Him. This faith in Jesus comes through the proclamation of the good news about God's method of justification for sinful man. Are you talkative about salvation? Some people seldom stop talking. One wonders why it is that when salvation is the subject that many dry up in their conversation. Does our silence betray our lack of Christian assurance and excitement? Have we forgotten Paul's words to the Corinthians about the ministry of reconciliation? It is well to listen to the words of Paul.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, **who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

Obedience and Love

What is it that causes a Christian to be active in evangelistic witness? One such cause is undoubtedly related to obedience to God. Every Christian is to glorify God in his body. It is in this train of thought that Paul writes: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). In seeking to do the will of Christ, we are not at liberty to pick and choose His commandments. Again, Paul says, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Thus, we are not to overlook the last words of our Lord in His instructions to make disciples of all nations: **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"** (**Matthew 28:19-20**). It was the vocation of Christ to bear witness to the truth; it is our vocation to bear witness to Him. The first incentive for evangelism is loving obedience to God and His Christ, and the second is loving concern for men. Are we sharing with our neighbors the "bread from heaven" (**John 6:32**). In this same speech, our Lord declares: **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty"** (**John 6:35**). Do we believe this? Have we forgotten the words of Jesus: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (**John 3:36**).

Are you ashamed of the gospel? Have you reached the stage in which you are embarrassed when talking about Him? Paul could write to Rome and say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (**Romans 1:16**). Why was Paul not ashamed? Listen once more to his penetrating words: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**1:17**). Again, listen to Paul as he takes wings to the heights of heaven

as he describes the gospel in a nutshell:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

Evangelism

Evangelism is never to be thought of as the task of a select few. Every Christian should practice what Andrew did when he found out about the Messiah. John writes, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (**John 1:40-42**). John also records another incident of someone sharing Jesus; this one was Philip. Jesus found him and said follow me. And, as a result of this call, he, in like manner, "found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'" (**John 1:45**). One cannot help but recall the words of Michael the archangel to Daniel:

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. **Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever** (**Daniel 12:1-3**).

The Work of Sunday School Teachers

Do not ever forget that you are the channel of imparting a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Bring your classes together and pray for conversions. Don't ever say that that boy or girl is too small or too insignificant. If you bring that boy or that girl to Christ, what a reformation we could have. There may be a Luther, a Wesley, a Bunyan, a Billy Sunday, a Billy Graham, or an Alexander Campbell. Today, I want to share with you a number of conversions mentioned by Dwight L. Moody in his sermon "The Reward of the Faithful."^[2] I share these stories in order to help you see the importance of your own personal ministry in leading souls to Christ.

First, Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) related the story of a teacher in southern Illinois, who taught her little girl to love the Savior. The teacher asked the young girl to get her father to come to Sunday school. This father was a swearing and drinking man; the love of God was not in his heart. But through the teacher's insistence, the little girl told her father about Jesus' love for him. This man came and accepted Christ. Before long, he had been instrumental in founding over seven hundred and eight Sunday schools in southern Illinois.^[3]

The Work of a Young Man

Second, Moody relates another story about a man whom he met in New York. At the time of this meeting, the man was a very diligent worker for the cause of Christ. Moody asked him to tell him about

his experience. This man told Moody that he had been a drunkard for over twenty years. His parents had forsaken him; his wife divorced him and married someone else. One day he went into an attorney's office, stoned out of his mind. He told the attorney what a sinner he was. He said, "I must be pretty low when my father and mother, my wife and kindred, cast me off, and there is no hope for me here or hereafter."^[4] But the attorney proved a true Samaritan—he told him about Jesus and about salvation. He guided his face toward Zion, the city of God. This man became a leader of a young men's meeting in New York.

Again, Moody also told another incident that occurred during one of his revival meetings. A young man in New York got up and told his experience. He said, "Nine months ago a Christian came to my house and told me that he wanted me to become a Christian. He pointed out the error of my ways, for I had been a hard drinker. I became converted and have not touched a drop of liquor since. If any one had asked who the most hopeless man in New York was, they would have pointed to me." Moody says that at the time this man gave his testimony he was the superintendent of a Sunday school^[5].

Lady in London

Finally, he tells about a mother in London who had traveled from Dundee to London, five hundred miles, just to ask Moody to pray for her boys. Later in London, she attended a meeting conducted by Moody. She was accompanied by only one of her boys—the other had died. This woman was a woman of wealth. She gave up her beautiful home and resided near the Agricultural Hall in order to be available to counsel those seeking the Lord. Toward the close of the meeting, she sent a letter to Moody. The letter, in part, reads:

My husband and I have sought as our greatest privilege to take unconverted friends one by one to the Agricultural Hall, and I thank God that, with a single exception, those brought under the preaching from your lips have accepted Christ as their Savior, and are rejoicing in His love.^[6]

Moody says that when he left London, she had the names of 150 who had accepted Christ from her. Moody went on to say, "If we had a thousand such mothers in Chicago we would lift it.

CLOSE

Today, I encourage you to take ten minutes to talk with someone about Jesus. Ten minutes for Christ every day will bring forth laborers into the harvest. Why not be like Andrew and bring your relative or relatives to Christ. Why not be like Philip and find a Nathanael and tell him about the Messiah. Remember that we are all ambassadors for God's kingdom. Remember that Jesus "has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

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^[1] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

^[2] Dwight L. Moody, "The Reward of the Faithful," in *A Heritage of Great Evangelical Teaching* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1996), 946-952.

^[3] Ibid., 948.

^[4] Ibid., 949.

^[5] Ibid.

^[6] Ibid., 951.